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**THREE LAWYERS, TWO TRANSLATORS CHARGED IN SCHEME TO FILE
FRAUDULENT ASYLUM APPLICATIONS**

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced yesterday that three lawyers and two translators associated with the law firm of Sekhon & Sekhon, an immigration law firm which had offices in Sacramento and San Francisco, were indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy, filing fraudulent immigration documents, and making false statements. The indictment alleges that between early 2000 and late 2004, the defendants filed numerous asylum applications with INS (later the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services of the Department of Homeland Security ("CIS")), containing fictitious stories of persecution the clients supposedly had suffered in their home countries on ethnic, religious or political grounds. The applications were often supported by doctor's letters, medical certificates, affidavits and other documents which were counterfeit or fraudulent. As a result, the indictment alleges, scores of Sekhon & Sekhon clients fraudulently obtained lawful status as asylees in the United States.

The indictment was the product of a three and a half year investigation carried out by Special Agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement in the Department of Homeland Security.

Named as defendants in the case were JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON, 36, formerly of Sacramento; JAGDIP SINGH SEKHON, 39, of Oakland; MANJIT KAUR RAI, 31, formerly of Antioch; IOSIF CAZA, 40, of Sacramento; and LUCIANA HARMATH, 27, formerly of Sacramento. The indictment indicates that the SEKHONS are brothers, who owned and managed the law firm of Sekhon & Sekhon. MANJIT KAUR RAI was an attorney who handled asylum applications at the firm, and IOSIF CAZA and LUCIANA HARMATH were Romanian translators who worked for clients of the firm on a contract basis.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorneys Benjamin B. Wagner and Camil A. Skipper, who are prosecuting the case, the indictment alleges that the law firm handled numerous asylum applications on behalf of persons from India and other South Asian countries, but that beginning in approximately 2000, an increasing percentage of the firm's asylum business involved persons from Romania. The indictment states that JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON, often assisted in cases involving Romanian clients by IOSIF CAZA or LUCIANA HARMATH, would interview clients seeking legal status in the United States, and then prepare asylum applications that often contained detailed but fictitious accounts of beatings, harassment, torture and sexual abuse directed at the clients in their home countries due to their ethnicity or to their religious or political activities. Under U.S. immigration laws, in order to qualify for asylum, an applicant must demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution in his or her country due to the applicant's race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. The

indictment alleges that JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON and MANJIT KAUR RAI would direct clients to collect documents to support the fictitious story, and that Romanian clients who wanted assistance in gathering documents were referred to IOSIF CAZA who, for a fee, would generate counterfeit documents that appeared to be letters, certificates or affidavits created in Romania. The indictment further alleges that all five defendants participated in preparation sessions with clients prior to interviews with Asylum Officers at CIS, or prior to appearances in immigration court, at which the defendants rehearsed the clients in telling the fictitious stories of persecution, and helped add details to the stories. According to the indictment, defendants JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON, JAGDIP SINGH SEKHON, and MANJIT KAUR RAI represented clients at the asylum hearings where the clients presented false testimony, and defendants IOSIF CAZA and LUCIANA HARMATH acted as interpreters for the clients during asylum interviews where false statements were made. Defendant MANJIT KAUR RAI is also charged with making false statements to investigating DHS agents on May 19, 2005.

Each of the defendants is charged with conspiracy to defraud the United States and to make false statements in asylum applications. Defendants JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON, MANJIT KAUR RAI, IOSIF CAZA and LUCIANA HARMATH are also charged with conspiracy to make false statements. Defendant JAGPRIT SINGH SEKHON is also charged with 11 counts of filing false documents in asylum proceedings and with three counts of aiding and abetting false statements. Defendant MANJIT KAUR RAI is also charged with two counts of filing false documents in asylum proceedings and with two counts of false statements. Defendant IOSIF CAZA is also charged with nine counts of filing false documents in asylum proceedings and with three counts of false statements. Defendant LUCIANA HARMATH is also charged with two counts of filing false documents in asylum proceedings and with one count of aiding and abetting false statements.

All the charges are felonies. For the conspiracy offenses, each defendant faces 5 years of imprisonment. For each offense of filing false documents in asylum proceedings, the maximum sentence is ten years in prison, and for each offense of making or aiding and abetting false statements, the maximum penalty is 5 years imprisonment. Upon conviction, each defendant would also face a fine of up to \$250,000 fine per count and a 3-year term of supervision. However, the actual sentence will be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines and other factors, and will be imposed at the discretion of the court. The indictment seeks forfeiture of over \$2.5 million from the SEKHONS, representing proceeds to Sekhon & Sekhon from the false document offenses, and over \$685,00 from defendant IOSIF CAZA, representing his proceeds from the offenses.

The United States Attorney's Office noted that the charges are only accusations, and that each defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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